

## Don't Want a Smart Meter? Get a Doctor's Note

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(TNS) — North Carolina will start offering an unusual escape clause for the thousands of North Carolina residents who complain that Duke Energy's two-way communication utility meters give them headaches, ear-ringing and a case of the "brain fog."

Residents who say they suffer from acute sensitivity to radio-frequency waves can say no to Duke's smart meters — as long as they have a notarized doctor's note to attest to their rare condition.

The N.C. Utilities Commission, which sets utility rates and rules, [created the new standard on Friday](#), possibly making North Carolina the first state to limit the smart meter technology revolution by means of a medical opinion. It took the Utilities Commission two years to resolve the dispute — longer than it takes to review a complicated rate increase or to issue a permit to build a coal-burning power plant — after considering the warnings and denials of conflicting studies and feuding experts.

Charlotte-based Duke had proposed charging customers extra if they refused a smart meter. Duke wanted to charge an initial fee of \$150 plus \$11.75 a month to cover the expense of sending someone out to that customer's house to take a monthly meter reading. But the Utilities Commission opted to give the benefit of the doubt to customers

with smart meter health issues until the Federal Communications Commission determines the health risks of the devices.

"This is a huge step in the right direction," said Andrew McAfee, a former music professor at UNC Chapel Hill and one-time principal horn for the N.C. Symphony Orchestra for 15 years who says proximity to cellphone towers, WiFi signals and wireless utility meters causes a burning sensation on his skin, gives him the sweats and makes him agitated.

"The removal of Duke's opt-out fees stops that added insult to injury for many who suffer debilitating electrosensitivity conditions and their associated health costs," McAfee said. "Most importantly, the NCUC order recognizes our medical doctor's proper role in determining what is healthy, not the FCC."

Duke Energy's two North Carolina utility subsidiaries are in the midst of switching its 3.4 million North Carolina customers to smart meters, which record electricity usage patterns in minute detail, rather than just showing the total amount of power used in a month. The granular data can be used to develop and coordinate energy efficiency strategies and to better manage the power grid during heat waves and other times of high energy demand.

And smart meters automatically transmit customer usage data to the utility company for analysis and billing.

Duke Energy Carolinas has installed more than 1.5 million smart meters so far. Duke Energy Progress, which plans to install 1.4 million, has installed 34,560 since May, said Duke spokesman Jeff Brooks.

About 6,000 Duke customers have expressed concerns about smart meters, Brooks said. The ones who do complain about it can be very persistent.

"More than a dozen individuals, including a physician, stated that they have personally experienced debilitating health impacts from the cumulative impact of RF emissions," the Utilities Commission said in its ruling. "A few went so far as to assert that RF emissions from smart meters contribute to violence and homicides."

The commission received a statement from the director of the Institute for Health and the Environment at the University of Albany in New York, co-signed by four other scientists and doctors. The letter said the greatest risk of radio frequency wave exposure is cancer, but symptoms include memory loss and fatigue.

Duke submitted a review by the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services concluding there is insufficient evidence to link radio frequency exposure to health problems. DHHS based its conclusions on research and statements from the American Cancer Society, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration and the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences.

After endless pleas and living in four different homes in the Triangle, McAfee reached a truce with Duke and for the past several years has been served on a landline utility meter, not a wireless meter. It is costing him \$5 a month, and he expects the Utilities Commission's ruling will exempt him from the monthly fee.

It remains to be seen whether all doctors lend their name and professional reputation to affirming a highly disputed medical condition. But McAfee, who now runs a business to detect electromagnetic frequency waves, predicted those who experience the symptoms are determined to keep their bodies and brains from getting bombarded by wireless signals.

"People are motivated and will find a way," McAfee said. "I have already heard of one person today bringing one to their doctor's office."

Duke won't be obligated to provide a landline meter to all customers. The Utilities Commission said Duke can install a smart meter and turn off the wireless transmissions so that the computerized device works like an old-fashioned meter.

Duke had submitted information that 33 states have opt-out fees for customers; Vermont forbids utilities from charging opt-out fees to customers, while Pennsylvania doesn't allow customers to opt out.

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